



The Nightmare Years to Come?

by Regis W. Matlak

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Contents

Executive Summary. 1

Introduction. 2

Part I: The Near East. 5

 Syria: Far More than a Civil War. 5

 The Return of Sectarian Violence in Iraq 8

 Iran’s Strategic Fears. 10

 Jordanian Vulnerabilities. 13

 Whither Egypt? 14

 Elsewhere in North Africa, Violence May Become a New Normal 16

 Palestinian Leadership and Unity Challenges. 17

 Israeli Challenges 18

 Apprehensive Monarchies. 19

 Multiple Challenges in Yemen 20

Part II: South Asia. 21

 Gathering Dangers in Afghanistan, Potential Consequences for Pakistan. . 21

 Continuing Indo-Pak Tensions 24

 India 25

 South Asian Storm Clouds. 26

Part III: Mitigating the Nightmare Years. 26

 Beware of Fiction Masquerading as Wisdom. 27

 Historic Interplay of the Policy Wish and Intelligence Failure: Distortion,
 Distraction, and Disregard. 28

Inattention to Unintended Consequences.	33
Beyond Cautionary Tales: Prescriptions for the Policy High Table and Bureaucratic Trench.	36
Part IV: In the Trenches	38
Part V: A Final Comment.	39
Notes.	40
About the Author.	51

Executive Summary

We have entered a particularly dangerous era in the Near East and South Asia—that is, the Greater Middle East. The context of today's situation is more alarming than respective current crises—as bad as they may be. Rather, there is an increasingly radicalized and violent sectarian environment made up of crosscutting crises occurring in the midst of proliferation; precision weapons; cyber war; increased ungoverned territory vulnerable to global, regional, and local jihadist exploitation; majoritarian authoritarianism; uncompromising sectarianism; ethnic, tribal, and sectarian-driven civil wars; massive popular anger and frustration over the lack of essential services and a diminishing quality of life, particularly in areas such as water, electricity, health, education, employment, and economic collapse; water wars and environmental endangerment; and the vulnerability of sensitive infrastructure targeted by state and nonstate actors, or an empowered lone wolf in the service of a state or nonstate actors.

For U.S. policymakers, strategists, and military and intelligence officials, there are cautionary tales from past crises and prescriptions that may prove useful as future crises unfold. Decisions made or not made matter, with regional and global consequences of both. Whatever decisions are made or not made, the greatest danger may be looming, though presently unknown, consequences for a region in tumult.

Introduction

For 3 years, the Greater Middle East has experienced numerous political, ethnic, social, and religious convulsions. While several regional states, such as Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Iraq, Tunisia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, along with al Qaeda and its affiliates, continue to capture international headlines, the Greater Middle East continues its drift toward violent, hardline sectarianism fueled by immense frustration and growing intolerance. This deadly drift, an enveloping malignance, is rooted in decades-long failed authoritarian leadership, hardened feelings of sustained injustice, minimal essential services, ecological endangerment and diminished natural resources (especially water), poor and undeveloped economies, crumbling infrastructures, systemic corruption, and youth bulge unemployment among other shortcomings and challenges. With God on their side, jihadist combatants have minimal room for compromise, short of tactical accommodation.

Today's convulsions pose great peril for regional and global security. But, the present danger may be a forewarning of a more harrowing future—The Nightmare Years to Come. This characterization is not simply an off-hand, provocative formulation. Rather, it is informed by William Shirer's memoir, *Twentieth Century Journey, The Nightmare Years: 1930–1940*. Shirer, a CBS correspondent in Berlin during the decade prior to World War II, witnessed the crumbling of the old order: "revolutions, uprisings and a spreading intolerance, violence, repression, aggression and barbarism in supposed civilized countries . . . massive unemployment, failing banks and businesses, falling currencies and spreading hunger."¹ Despite these warning signs, state governments and their leadership were unprepared, unwilling, and/or unable to preempt another devastating war. Some nations were war weary and still recovering from the scars of a previous generation's battle, others simply too tired to believe otherwise. British Foreign Minister Neville Chamberlain's 1938 diplomatic victory declaration, "Peace in our time," captured the unreality most tragically.

Certainly, some world leaders, notably an out-of-power Winston Churchill, saw the coming storm. But it is fair to judge that no one imagined in the mid-1930s that the next decade would bring Germany's renunciation of the Versailles Treaty; rearmament and reoccupation of the demilitarized Rhineland; integration of the rump of Austria and German-speaking Czechoslovakia as part of a Greater Germany; the

occupation of Czechoslovakia; Blitzkrieg in Poland, and the later tragic 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and 1944 Warsaw Uprising; the German occupation of the Low Countries and France; the British army's evacuation from Dunkirk; the Battle for Britain and the V-1 and V-2 rocket attacks that resulted in the loss of thousands of lives and destruction in the streets of London and other British manufacturing centers; the Holocaust's Final Solution; the devastation of the Battle of Stalingrad; D-Day's immense complexity and Hitler's counter-offensive at the Battle of the Bulge; the surprise attack at Pearl Harbor; the Battle for Midway, Iwo Jima, Guadalcanal, the Bataan Death March, and other battles in the Pacific theater; and atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Benefiting from perspective provided by Shirer's memoir recounting the people and events in Europe, decisions made and not made, and the consequences of which led to World War II, the present situation in the Greater Middle East should serve as a warning. Certainly, analogies can be dangerous. Experience suggests they be used with great caution, if at all. But, at the very least, we can be informed by history: "a lantern on the stern"² to borrow historian Barbara Tuchman's apt phrase that illuminates the causes of history's major foreign policy disasters. Then, now, and in the future, consequences—including those unintended though not necessarily unforeseen—take control. A 21st-century version of Churchill's World War I "The Terrible Ifs Accumulate"³ is gathering and "all these nasty things can bounce badly."

Throughout the Greater Middle East, it is difficult to underestimate the potential role of a state, nonstate, or individual evil genius employing cyber war/terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and/or precision weapons targeting sensitive infrastructure. Drone warfare will become more sophisticated, deadly, and available. Information on developing weapons of mass destruction will be increasingly accessible. In the coming decade or two, it is prudent to judge that at least four Greater Middle East states—Pakistan, India, Israel, and Iran—are likely to have nuclear weapon capability and/or other weapons of mass destruction, precision weapons, drones, and cyber war know-how, including the possibility of threatening the U.S. power grid.⁴

In this context, it may be important to take notice of incremental overt and/or possible covert technological advances. Incremental concerns may include such military-related advances as Iran's November 2013 unveiling of its surveillance and

combat drone, Fotros, with a range that covers much of the Middle East, including Israel.⁵ More ominously, the same technological advancement that will permit Amazon's drone delivery of online purchases could also turn a weaponized, miniature drone into a weapon of choice for a 21st-century jackal. Finally, the concerns of the Defense Science Board, a U.S. Department of Defense advisory panel, include the need to track small inventories of nuclear material, covert facilities, the use of non-traditional technologies and new nuclear players, according to the *Wall Street Journal*.⁶ In the *Journal* article, the Defense Science Board is reported as judging that "For the first time since the early decades of the nuclear era" the United States needs to be just as concerned about new nuclear nations and transnational groups as it is about existing nuclear weapon countries. To this end, the Defense Science Board advocates "analyzing vast amounts of data to unearth anomalous events that could signal threats such as a covert nuclear operation."

Present—and likely future—crises are occurring amidst a changed Greater Middle East strategic environment. Since the official demise of an already weak Ottoman Empire and the rise of Western influence almost 100 years ago, there is today minimal major power influence—no Egyptian asked U.S. permission to remove Hosni Mubarak from power. Nor, in July 2013, did the *Tamarrod* (Rebellion) protesters that sought Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi's removal seek external permission. Modern day Turkey's moderate Islamist government has made an attempt to reassert Turkish regional influence, but many others suggest Turkey's efforts have fallen far short, and such a goal should be viewed as aspirational at best. Turkey's "no problems with neighbors" foreign policy has become "problems everywhere." Concurrently, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government is confronting serious charges of corruption and Turkey's internal political and economic challenges, including its secular-sectarian balance and the nature of Turkey's democracy.⁷

Some Middle East observers highlight that we are fast approaching an era in which the Greater Middle East's political map may once again be in play.⁸ Whatever may have been the initial merits of local initiatives during the uprisings of the past few years, a vacuum of global leadership may be the most dangerous of the challenges ahead. Whether intended or unintended, expected or unexpected, many of the crises to come are building on or feeding off one another. Already, globalization

and the speed and availability of information empower, enable, and magnify the challenges. There is little likelihood that local combatants, driven by the absolute correctness of their views or perceived survival instinct, will know or care about larger regional or global consequences.

Part I: The Near East

The challenges in the Near East are numerous, severe, often overlapping, and mutually reinforced. Many of these crises may worsen, some may recede, or others arise. There is no crystal ball for respective outcomes. Rather, it is the worrisome trajectory of aggregate dangers that serve as a forewarning.

Syria: Far More than a Civil War

Understandably, the Syrian Civil War—and its bleeding into Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey, and Israel—is a major focus of international concern. In Syria, approximately 140,000 Syrians have been killed, 9.5 million internally displaced, and 2.5 million seeking haven outside Syria while the Damascus regime has adopted starvation as a weapon of war.⁹ But, the greatest fear is that we are witnessing in Syria the probable consequences of a drought stricken, poorly administered, repressive, failed state: a rump Alawite-controlled region; chaotic, fragmented extremist takeovers in Sunni-populated areas; and a tipping point for a region-wide, sectarian conflagration. According to David Shedd, deputy director of the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, in comments to the Aspen Security Forum in Colorado on July 20, 2013, “Left unchecked I’m very concerned that the most radical elements will take over larger segments of the opposition groups.”¹⁰

Thomas Hegghammer, a senior researcher at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment in Oslo, writes, “Sometime in the spring or summer of 2013, history was made in Syria. That was when the number of foreign fighters (5,000) exceeded that of any previous conflict in the modern history of the Muslim world,” to include during the 1980s jihad in Afghanistan.¹¹ In Afghanistan, there were never more than 3,000–4,000 at any one time. Of possible greater alarm, the Syrian war has attracted over 7,000 foreign fighters from over 50 nations, according to Director of National Intelligence (DNI) James Clapper’s Annual Worldwide Threat Assessment

to Congress on January 29, 2014.¹² DNI Clapper also stated that Syria “is becoming a center of radical extremism and a potential threat to the homeland.”¹³ Also, the International Center for the Study of Radicalization has estimated “that nearly 2,000 Western Europeans had traveled to Syria to fight and that the number was growing fast.”¹⁴ According to various media accounts, the December 2013 suspension of U.S. and British nonlethal aid to Syrian rebels reflected concerns about increasing Islamist influence or control among various opposition organizations, including those supported by the West.¹⁵ This reporting indicates the United States is wrestling with the prospect of supporting “non–al Qaeda” Islamists, such as the Islamist Front in Syria, as long as the Front would support the Western-aligned, Syrian Opposition Coalition’s leadership.¹⁶

The fear of Islamist extremists is so great that the Syrian moderate, secular opposition and the Damascus government ultimately may find common cause for a negotiated settlement that then would unite them in a fight against radical jihadists, such as Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).¹⁷ Additionally, Syria’s strife has morphed from a sectarian-driven civil war to a regional Sunni-Shi’a proxy war led by Saudi Arabia and Iran respectively,¹⁸ and renewed U.S.-Russia competition throughout the region.¹⁹ The Crimean crisis could diminish prospects for U.S.-Russia cooperation concerning Syria, and key players throughout the region, particularly Syria President Bashar al-Asad’s regime, hardliners in Iran, Saudi Arabia’s leadership, and Israeli decisionmakers will be watching its outcome closely.²⁰

In a detailed account of “Iranian Strategy in Syria,” authors Will Fulton, Joseph Holliday, and Sam Wyer make it abundantly clear that “Syria is vital to Iran’s strategic interests in the Middle East and has long been Iran’s closest state ally.”²¹ The toppling of Syrian President Bashar al-Asad’s regime would alone be a strategic defeat for Iran, but it also would jeopardize Iran’s ability to maintain support for its close Shi’a ally, Lebanese Hizballah.²² Iran’s support for Hizballah includes Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) advisors; drones reportedly supplied by Iran²³ but assembled by a specialized Hizballah team;²⁴ and an Iranian-supplied, Chinese-built C-802 guided missile that hit an Israeli warship (*Hanit*, *Sa’ar 5*-class missile ship) on July 14, 2006, killing four sailors.²⁵ Moreover, Israel’s reported attack on a Russian-supplied SA-17 weapons convoy and Iranian-supplied Fateh-110 surface-to-surface

missiles reflects Israel's concerns about Hizballah gaining access to other advanced weaponry.²⁶

For its part, Hizballah has committed thousands of fighters and arms in support of the Alawite regime and to protect its own long-term interests. According to an American Enterprise Institute and Institute for the Study of War Joint Study (AEI/ISW), "Lebanese Hizballah militants participate in a number of direct support activities, including sniper and counter-sniper operations, facility and route protection, joint clearing operations and direct engagement with opposition forces."²⁷

At the same time, the Sunni "Tehreek-e-Taliban" is sending hundreds of fighters from Pakistan to Syria, and the "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" (formerly al Qaeda in Iraq) increased presence in Syria reflects one of many Greater Middle East's crosscutting challenges.²⁸ Press reports highlight that U.S. officials acknowledge, "thousands of fighters have entered Syria to join an insurgency that is increasingly dominated by groups with militant Islamist agendas."²⁹ The media account indicates one of the largest of the new groups, Jaysh al-Muhajireen Wal Ansar, is made up of fighters from Central Asia and Europe. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, think-tank, and media outlets, ISIS has become the main umbrella group for Sunni foreign fighters in Syria, and includes Saudis, Kuwaitis, Egyptians, Chinese (Muslims),³⁰ and Sunni Muslims from Lebanon's Abdullah Azzam Brigades.³¹ The Abdullah Azzam Brigades—named after the Palestinian mentor to Osama bin Ladin—has claimed responsibility for the November 2013 bombing of the Iranian embassy in Beirut and was headed by a Saudi, Majid bin Muhammad al-Majid, who was arrested in Lebanon and later died of kidney failure in jail.³² An increasingly powerful ISIS leader in northern Syria, Tarkhan Batirashvili (Arab nom de guerre Emir Umar al-Shishani), is an ethnic Chechen who served previously in the Republic of Georgia's military. There also is a growing concern that an outflow of European "Syrian jihadists" could result in combatants returning home to "commit acts of terror on European soil or serve as inspirations to others."³³

There is an unnerving risk in a de facto alliance among Bashar al-Asad's Syria, Hizballah, Iran, and Russia. It establishes the potential for a confrontation between a violent sectarian coalition alongside a major power and a loose alliance of the United States, major European states, North Atlantic Treaty Organization ally Turkey, and

Gulf Cooperation Council states, especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Given such a constellation of players, the Syrian war can morph from a regional conflagration into something much more uncontrollable.

To a large extent, there is great concern that the dominant jihadist groups' shared vision extends beyond Asad's ouster. According to former and current U.S. and Middle East officials, jihadist groups "are transforming the conflict into a symbolic struggle against the West and Israel, using words and images that resonate with like-minded Muslims from the Arab Peninsula to Western Europe."³⁴ Present day boundaries and governments would be replaced by a single Islamic state. According to Bruce Reidel, a former CIA officer and adviser to four U.S. administrations, "Syria has become the most important destination for aspiring jihadists ever. . . . For jihadis, it is the road to Jerusalem at last."³⁵

Lastly, Syria's minority Christian community believes radical Islamist groups, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, are determined to drive them from their homes. Syrian bishops have been kidnapped and priests have been killed; ISIS has desecrated Greek Catholic and Armenian Catholic churches.³⁶ Reflecting the cross-cutting nature of the conflict, "Coptic churches in Egypt have been attacked, and Pakistan last week (late September 2013) experienced the deadliest church bombing in the country's history."³⁷

The Return of Sectarian Violence in Iraq

It is increasingly evident that a sustained cycle of violence in Iraq has returned. According to a wide variety of media reports, over 8,000 Iraqis were killed from April to December 2013.³⁸ Of particular concern is that there has been a "sharp rise in the number of bullet-riddled bodies found on the streets," characteristic of the worst days of sectarian violence in Iraq during 2006–2007.³⁹ A key player in this re-surgent violence is the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. ISIS is now active in Syria and Iraq, and in Iraq its objective is to establish control of several Iraqi provinces (ISIS "emirates"), including Salahuddin and Diyala (Daash Emirate) and Anbar (Jazeera Emirate). In this effort, ISIS has exhibited "extensive training, ruthless motivation and tactical sophistication," according to open source reporting.⁴⁰ Sabah Karhout, chairman of the Anbar Provincial Council, stated in December 2013 that al Qaeda

(ISIS) controls 40 percent of the desert area of Anbar Province, an echo of al Qaeda in Iraq activity in 2004. The January 2014 ISIS takeover of Fallujah and parts of Ramadi in Anbar Province reflects a combination of increased ISIS influence and a failure of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's government to further Sunni reconciliation and reintegration.⁴¹

Overall ISIS strategy has included establishing elements of governance such as courts, schools, and civil bureaucracies; sustained gun battles against Iraq security forces; assassinations of political figures; and intimidation of local populations. At the same time, according to press reporting, Iraqi security forces lack the signals intelligence and analytic capacity that assisted greatly when working with U.S. forces. Rather, Iraqi forces rely on less successful heavy-handed tactics that alienate the civilian population.⁴² According to a spate of press reporting in late 2013 and early 2014, Iraqi security forces were not up to the task of retaking Fallujah and Ramadi from ISIS militants. Rather, Prime Minister Maliki appealed to "the tribes and people of Fallujah to expel terrorists from the city in order to spare themselves the risk of armed clashes."⁴³ Moreover, press reporting and Iraq observers indicate that the fighting in Fallujah and Ramadi was due to Maliki's neglect "to sustain the relationships forged by American troops and instead embarked on a campaign of arrests, harassment, and persecution of his Sunni opponents," including policies that victimized prominent Sunnis.⁴⁴

Longtime scholar and author on Iraq issues Toby Dodge has assessed in great detail how Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's Shi'a-led sectarian government has pursued political, military, security, and intelligence policies that have polarized the Sunni, Shi'a, and Kurdish population and, as a result, squandered a historic opportunity to rise above sectarian governance.⁴⁵ Dodge and other Iraq analysts judge that U.S. decisionmaking in the aftermath of Saddam's overthrow contributed greatly to exacerbating Iraq's sectarian divide.⁴⁶ But Iraq's current polarization and renewed violence are driven by internal squabbles never fully resolved since Saddam Hussein's overthrow.

Some may argue that the Sunni extremist threat to Iraq is exaggerated; after all, even as the insurgency in Iraq raged after 2006, the country realized its highest oil production in over 24 years with increases in oil exports from its southern

ports—about 3 million barrels per day—making Iraq the second highest OPEC producer after Saudi Arabia. Still, the threat of disruption to the national energy program posed by Sunni extremist groups will likely undermine Iraq’s full energy potential and economic development.⁴⁷

Iraq’s Sunni coreligionists in Syria appear to have emboldened Iraq’s Sunni Arabs to challenge Baghdad’s sectarian regime. Iraqi tribal shaykhs from Sunni-populated Anbar Province are increasingly supporting Sunni rebels in Syria, and Iraqi National Police Intelligence has reported other Sunni provinces in Iraq are stockpiling weapons.⁴⁸

At the same time, U.S. officials have been long concerned that the Baghdad government is facilitating Iran’s support for Damascus.⁴⁹ Moreover, there is a drumbeat of media reports indicating that Shi’a militias, such as Iraq’s Asaib Ahl al-Haq and Lebanese Hizballah, are playing an increasingly crucial role in support of the Asad government, motivated largely by ties to Iran and worries over a larger regional struggle against al Qaeda, other extremist jihadists, and the region’s Sunni Arab governments.⁵⁰

Finally, Iraq’s Kurds, motivated at least in part by longstanding differences with the Maliki government, seem to be positioning themselves for greater autonomy if not ultimate independence from Baghdad. According to a Woodrow Wilson Center assessment, “The Kurds of northern Iraq are about to take a giant step toward making possible an independent homeland by becoming an exporter of Iraqi oil and gas on their own in defiance of the central government in Baghdad.”⁵¹ A separate assessment indicates Kurdish energy sector successes “have encouraged a more nationalist and less compromising KRG [Kurdish Regional Government] position.”⁵²

Iran’s Strategic Fears

Of possible greater importance to Iran than Syria, Iran would suffer significant political and security defeats should Iraq’s Sunni Arab population return to power or significant portions of Iraqi territory become a safe haven for Sunni jihadists. The AEI/ISW Joint Report indicates that Iran is going to great lengths, including the use of significant financial, military, and intelligence assets, to maintain a Shi’a-led government in Baghdad.⁵³ Public statements by senior Iranian advisors explicitly indicate

Iran's political leaders dread the possible consequences of the Syrian war that could threaten Iran's strategic national security interests.⁵⁴

Iran's current leadership was in power during the 1980–1988 Iran-Iraq war and witnessed its death and destruction, including each country's use of ballistic missiles and chemical weapons. Deeply concerned that an Israeli and/or U.S. attack on its nuclear-related facilities may be an opening salvo intended to topple the Islamic Republic's regime, it is prudent to believe that Iran, in the long term, will maneuver to maintain a skill set that permits the option to pursue a nuclear weapon “break out” capability—at least to the level of formulating a credible public policy of nuclear ambiguity.

In post-election interviews, many Iranians suggested that Iran's new president and former nuclear issue negotiator, Hasan Rouhani, will bring a change to President Ahmadinejad's combative style and work to end Iran's international isolation while not compromising Iran's “mastering of the nuclear process,” as articulated in a 2004 Rouhani speech.⁵⁵ The November 23, 2013 Iran-P5+1 interim nuclear agreement potentially provides the first step toward ending such international isolation and “modestly eases existing sanctions.”⁵⁶ But there exist differing interpretations on what was agreed to during these negotiations.⁵⁷ Thus Rouhani may have a narrow window in time and space—hardline opponents such as IRGC commander Mohammad Ali Jafari are publicly sniping at Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, advising the foreign minister to “stick to diplomacy and stay out of military business.”⁵⁸

Though sanctions will continue to hurt Iran's economy, the regime is unlikely to be challenged successfully by any political opposition or popular dissent. Iran's pervasive and brutal internal security apparatus is alert to any organized opposition, according to media reports, United Nations (UN) documents, and a U.S. Department of State report.⁵⁹ These sources specifically indicate the Iranian regime will put down internal rebellion even at the risk of inflicting massive casualties. Since coming to power in 1979, the Iranian leadership has conducted assassination operations at home and abroad; imprisoned, tortured, and/or executed oppositionists; rounded up tens of thousands of dissidents; beat back a brief civil war during the early 1980s; and survived the loss of several layers of its most senior leadership in bombings

of the Iranian parliament, the Islamic Republic Party headquarters, and the Iranian cabinet. Iran's power elite are well experienced in being the hunter and the hunted. Survival instincts will take hold.

Indeed, Iran is not sitting idly by, merely reacting to events intended to weaken the regime's hold on power or lessen its pretension as a regional hegemon. It may be instructive to recognize that Iran, according to reputable media accounts, has a successful track record for conducting successful covert action operations, including one that resulted in Iraq's present leadership being virtual clients of Tehran.⁶⁰ According to various media accounts, the Iranian covert campaign in Iraq was directed by Qassem Suleimani, head of the IRGC's Quds Force, and Iran continues to have a range of Iraqi militias to call upon, including Kataib Hizballah and Asaib al-Haq, and the Promised Day Brigades; Kataib Hizballah is led by Abu Mahdi al-Muhandas, who allegedly helped plan the 1983 attack on the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait, and Asaib al-Haq is headed by Qais al-Khazali, whom the U.S. believes was involved in the kidnapping and execution-style murder of U.S. Marines in Karbala in 2007.

According to the AEI/ISW Joint Report and Middle East media sources, there are persuasive indicators suggesting Iran is conducting operations intended to telegraph that Iran is a strong player capable of inflicting pain on the West and its pro-West allies including Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and other Arab Gulf states.⁶⁰ According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Iran is widely believed to have sponsored the 2012 "Shamoon virus" cyber attacks on 30,000 Saudi Aramco computers; the same virus damaged computer systems at Qatar's energy company Ras Gas.⁶² In addition, Iranian military officials were implicated in the attempt to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the United States. In an intense crisis atmosphere, it is unlikely Saudi sensitive infrastructure would escape Iranian attention. It would not be overly alarmist to be concerned that an Iranian-sponsored cyber attack against sensitive U.S. infrastructure could take place if the Islamic regime believed its survival was at risk. Moreover, Iran's 2013 infiltration and remote surveillance of the unclassified U.S. Navy Marine Corps Internet surprised U.S. military and intelligence officials, according to the *Wall Street Journal*.⁶³ Current and former U.S. officials and think-tank cyber-security specialists described the costly Iranian cyber-

offensive attack as “worrisome” and a possible “significant risk” for future military operations.

At a minimum, it is unwise to believe Iran is not planning aggressively for a future confrontation with Israel, the United States, and the West. Such a potential confrontation would be of increased concern in the event the follow-on nuclear talks are derailed. Recent press reporting on an upsurge in regional sectarian violence since the deal was reached points toward a forewarning for what is at stake: “the promise and the peril of what could be the start of a more peaceful era in the Middle East—or the beginning of a new round of bloodletting.”⁶⁴

Jordanian Vulnerabilities

Jordan, already dealing with an Iraqi refugee population, is being confronted with a Syrian refugee crisis exacerbating its existing internal political, sectarian, and economic plight. Ten percent (and counting) of Jordan’s population is made up of refugees. In addition, according to media accounts, a domestic opposition statement was signed by a thousand opposition signatories who included “nationalists, tribal leaders, and retired officers, but also including many leftists, trade unionists, and representatives of Hirak popular movements.”⁶⁵ The signed manifesto also included a rejection of Jordan “becoming an alternative homeland for the Palestinian people.” This latter issue has been a major concern of many East Jordanian nationalists for years—some so conservative that they have been referred to as a Jordanian Likud or a Jordanian Tea Party movement.” This cross section of Jordanian society is strongly opposed to Jordan being the alternative state for the 2 to 3 million Palestinians in Jordan, and is “warning the king and his government to refuse any peace plan” that does not satisfy Jordan’s “highest interests.”⁶⁶

At the same time, there is increasing concern that religious extremists in Syria are likely to turn their sights on Jordan at some point. Jihadists from Baqaa, the largest Palestinian refugee camp (80,000 people) in Jordan, are traveling to Syria to fight the Asad regime. According to a Carnegie Endowment for International Peace/Sada analysis, “the Jordanian Salafi-jihadi community is among the biggest contributors of fighters—between 700 and 1000—to Syria.”⁶⁷ Ibrahim Arabaty, a Baqaa community leader and teacher, reflects great concern among Palestinians regarding their

future status as a consequence of an Israeli-Palestinian agreement, stating that the mood in the Baqaa camp is “explosive, unfortunately.”⁶⁸ Abu Muhammad al-Tahawi, a prominent Jordanian jihadist ideologue, stated, “Jihad in Syria is obligatory for any Muslim.”⁶⁹ The Jordanian city of Irbid appears to be a key location for Salafi-jihadists, and several other Jordanian cities have experienced jihadist protests. The reported Arab Gulf states’ arming of Salafis in Syria may bounce badly for Jordan in the not-too-distant future.

It is highly unlikely the Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty could survive the Hashemite monarchy’s demise. A treaty abrogation would bring Israel perilously close to a new era of being surrounded by radical and hostile “Confrontation States,” including an increasingly frustrated and angry Palestinian population on the West Bank and in Gaza. In the event of an Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty abrogation, it would be problematic for Egypt’s leadership to maintain the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty.

Whither Egypt?

The revolutionary spirit in Tahrir Circle that toppled Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in 2011 experienced a second round in July 2013 that was largely responsible for President Morsi and his pro-Muslim Brotherhood government being removed from office by the Egyptian military. Prior to Morsi’s removal, Egypt continued to experience a collapsing economy, political uncertainty, and increasing extremist violence in the Sinai. As early as January 2013, Egypt’s political problems prompted Minister of Defense General Abdul Fatah al-Sisi to express publicly his concern that disagreements between Islamists and their opponents could lead to “collapse of the state” and “threaten the future of coming generations.”⁷⁰ Samer S. Shehata, a specialist on Egyptian politics, assessed that “the authority of the state is in question,” and that government legitimacy is no longer accepted.⁷¹ Thomas Carothers and Nathan J. Brown, of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, wrote in May 2013, “Egypt is wracked by harsh street protests, an angry impasse and utter distrust between the government and the main opposition parties, massive public disaffection, growing sectarian tension and increasing murmurings of a possible military coup.”⁷²

A cautionary note for a post-Morsi government may be in order. It would be wise to recall the unintended consequences of the Mubarak regime’s early 1990s

“successful” fight against the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and Gamaat Islamiyya: radical Egyptian jihadists—most notably Ayman Zawahiri and Muhammad Atta—departed Egypt and made their way to join with Osama bin Ladin and form al Qaeda. Several Egyptian jihadists would later assume operational command positions in al Qaeda. Some Egyptian analysts caution that today’s “successful” fight against the Muslim Brotherhood “has driven people to join extremist groups—which now have between 500 and 2,000 fighters.”⁷³ Kamal Habib, a former Islamic Jihad member and veteran of the 1990s fight, suggests the current situation is a greater challenge to the state’s authority.

Pro-Morsi supporters, Islamist students, along with secular protesters, continue to demonstrate at Cairo University and Ain Shams and Al-Azhar, despite harsh crackdowns.⁷⁴ According to media reporting, Tunisian Islamist political leader Rached Ghannouchi believes it is imperative that reconciliation among former President Morsi’s supporters, the Egyptian military, and the interim government succeed; he stated, “confrontation on Egypt’s streets now endangers the whole region”⁷⁵ Numerous Middle East observers voiced concerns about the mid-August 2013 crackdown in Cairo, highlighting the prospect for a sustained escalation of violence, severe negative implications for Egypt’s already worsening economy, and consequences that will play out for months, if not years.⁷⁶ In the immediate aftermath of finding out his daughter was killed when Egyptian police stormed Cairo’s Rabaa al-Adawiya, Islamist political leader Mohamed el-Beltagi “warned that ongoing violence would turn Egypt into a new Syria.”⁷⁷

Since mid-2013, Egypt has experienced increased sectarian violence, particularly in the Sinai Peninsula and other areas in Egypt, including Cairo. Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis appears to be the main organized jihadist group.⁷⁸ Though the organization is made up of primarily nomadic tribesmen from Sinai, it also has members from the Nile Delta region and some foreign fighters. Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis continues to claim responsibility for numerous terrorist operations, including late-January 2014 operations that targeted Cairo’s police headquarters and the surface-to-air downing of a military helicopter in the Sinai Peninsula.⁷⁹ These January 2014 events have led some Egypt observers, such as Shadi Hamid, a fellow at the Brookings Institution’s Saban Center, to suggest “this low-level insurgency against the Egyptian regime

is likely to intensify, and it is increasingly expanding into major urban centers.”⁸⁰ Similarly, Michele Dunne and Thomas Carothers suggest U.S. national security interests (and those of the Egyptian people) “might well be threatened by reinvigorated Islamic extremism” due to the political path being followed by the Egyptian military.”⁸¹

Whatever the results of the Egyptian military’s efforts to stabilize Egypt, the country’s economic and political challenges remain. Gulf Arab financial support to the interim government will likely be helpful in the short term.⁸² But, a post-Morsi government may have great difficulty accepting International Monetary Fund (IMF) constraints required to address fundamental long-term economic problems. There also is lingering concern that Egypt and Ethiopia may not be able to negotiate water-related issues associated with Ethiopia’s Nile River Renaissance Dam, which may endanger Egypt’s water security, specifically a drinking water shortage and the destruction of a significant amount of Egypt’s agricultural land.⁸³ Media accounts highlight Egyptian politicians’ threats that should Ethiopia go forward without a negotiated agreement, Egypt could be threatened with increased political instability, “threatening a crisis that Egyptian experts said could, at its most extreme, lead to war.”⁸⁴

Elsewhere in North Africa, Violence May Become a New Normal

The Libyan government is increasingly losing ground to lawlessness and extremist militias, according to press reports during 2013.⁸⁵ Responsible international observers believe Libya is at a crucial moment, with a battle between proponents of a coherent government desiring a transition to democracy and anti-democracy forces, such as jihadists, militias, and tribal networks. Libyan stability is at risk if Western nations are disengaged.⁸⁶ The spring 2013 attack on the French embassy “may prove to be the start of a trend, in which case Libyan—and by extension North African—instability would become a permanent status quo,” and a breeding ground or safe haven for extremist organizations. In June 2013, Libya’s army chief of staff resigned after deadly clashes between protesters and a military-aligned militia, Libya Shield, in Benghazi. Confronted with numerous political assassinations, kidnappings of senior officials such as the prime minister and deputy chief of

intelligence, and out-of-control militia violence, the Libyan government's actions to rein in rival militias and hardline Islamists "risks a backlash leading to outright battles between pro- and anti-government militias."⁸⁷ The September 2012 killing of the U.S. Ambassador and three other U.S. officials in Benghazi underscored the chaos and confusion surrounding the increasing violence.

Palestinian Leadership and Unity Challenges

Political disagreements between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas continue to hinder Palestinian unity. Press accounts underscore that the "78-year-old [Palestinian Authority leader] Mr. Abbas presides over a fiercely divided people, with the militant Hamas movement ruling the Gaza Strip and his more moderate Fatah faction dominating the West Bank. His political weakness was apparent this week at stormy leadership meetings."⁸⁸ In mid-April 2013, the Palestinian Authority's then prime minister, Salam Fayyad, resigned out of utter frustration. He told *New York Times* journalist Roger Cohen that he had hit a wall—Palestinian division and Israeli intransigence. Fayyad was highly critical of Palestinian leadership: "Our story is a story of failed leadership from way early on. . . . It is incredible that the fate of the Palestinian people has been in the hands of leaders so entirely casual, so guided by spur of the moment decisions, without seriousness. We don't strategize, we cut deals in a tactical way and we hold ourselves hostage to our own rhetoric." The Palestinian Authority's Fatah old guard wanted him out and Hamas hates him.⁸⁹

In such a hopeless local environment and raging regional strife, it should come as no surprise if a Palestinian third intifada occurs. There was media speculation on the risks associated with Secretary of State John Kerry's renewed peace initiative—"Palestinian expectations rise and then are dashed, leading to violence."⁹⁰ A former member of the U.S. Middle East negotiating team during the Clinton administration, Aaron Miller, who supports the renewed effort, cautioned, "Let's hope there is something new here, if this is old wine in a new bottle, there's going to be trouble."⁹¹ Essentially, Aaron Miller raises the prospects of the unintended consequences of failure. Relatedly, media reporting warns of a looming escalation of violence as a result of "Jewish activists demanding the right to pray at the site of their destroyed temple," Jerusalem's Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif.⁹²

Israeli Challenges

Israel has its own challenges, particularly significant security concerns arguably of increasing complexity and danger. But, just as important, Israel has had its own drumbeat of strategic difficulties. In a recent *Middle East Journal* article, former Israeli Deputy National Security Advisor Charles D. Freilich writes, “Many of the diplomatic and military initiatives Israel has undertaken have gone awry, and the number of policy failures has become untenable.”⁹³ Also, official Israeli government investigations—the Agranat Commission on the October 1973 war, the Kahan Commission on Israel’s 1982 invasion of Lebanon, and the Winograd Commission on the 2006 Lebanon/Hizballah war—explicitly reflect these national security shortcomings. In the 2013 documentary film *The Gatekeepers*, five former heads of Israel’s internal security service, Shin Bet, are highly critical of Israeli political decisionmaking, particularly that Israel’s responses to security threats are tactical, with little or no strategic thinking.

Perhaps understandably, Israel lacks a strategic response to the violent convulsions in today’s Greater Middle East. Some Israeli officials describe Israel’s current tactical response as a “castle mentality,” creating a security moat composed of “high-tech border fences, intensified military deployments and sophisticated intelligence” in the hope of buying time.⁹⁴ Israel’s airstrikes targeting Hizballah missile-related sites—“game changing weapons” according to Israeli retired Major General Eyal Ben-Reuven—underscore increasing fears of the Syrian Civil War expanding into a more regional struggle.⁹⁵ Israeli Major General Yoav Har-Even, director of the Israeli military planning branch, is quoted as saying, “I don’t have, today, a contingency plan to destroy global jihad.” Israeli officials assess the worsening convulsions in the Greater Middle East as possibly resulting in the redrawing of the region’s geopolitical map. These Israeli officials believe this will result in Israel’s encirclement by an area that will be a no-man’s-land—an “axis of resistance”—and an updated and more dangerous version of the confrontation and rejectionist reality of decades past. At the same time, Israel is being confronted with a newer phenomenon—an orchestrated effort to isolate and delegitimize Israel via boycott, divestment, and sanctions—“that is potentially more dangerous for Israel than the Iranian nuclear program,” according to a longtime, well-regarded Israeli

journalist and author.⁹⁶ As the region's violent strife worsens, it may be reasonable to believe Israel will need a bigger moat.

Apprehensive Monarchies

To date, the Arab uprisings have not resulted in any monarchy's demise. But Gulf monarchies have experienced internal tensions. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has clamped down on internal dissent, particularly targeting Muslim Brotherhood members plotting to overthrow the UAE and other Gulf monarchies, according to various press reports.⁹⁷ While the UAE clamps down on Muslim Brotherhood activity, UAE/Dubai has embraced a significant reform effort intended to improve governance in each of its 46 ministries and regulatory agencies—3,600 “Key Performance Indicators” are monitored regularly by Dubai's ruler, Muhammad bin Rashid.⁹⁸

For the past year Bahrain, led by a Sunni minority and home base of the U.S. Fifth Fleet, has teetered on increased violence reaching a sustained level. In June 2013, *Al Jazeera* reported that Bahrain authorities arrested a number of “Iran-linked” individuals for conducting anti-regime activity.⁹⁹ In April 2013, various Middle East media reported that Bahrain's Council of Ministers placed Lebanese Hizballah on its terrorist list,¹⁰⁰ charging it with providing material and logistic support to local Shia militants for the purpose of conducting sabotage as part of an Iranian plot to undermine Bahrain's government.

As a result of Arab Spring violence throughout the region, Saudi Arabia has initiated a number of domestic measures to maintain stability, including a priority to create more jobs. The sustained regional violence may have led Saudi Arabia to conduct a November 2013 clampdown on illegal foreign laborers that resulted in the arrest of thousands of undocumented workers.¹⁰¹ Also, in early February 2014, a Royal decree issued by the Saudi Royal Court stating that Saudi citizens who join or aid terrorist groups would be imprisoned is intended to preempt the possible return of radicalized fighters from abroad.¹⁰²

At the same time, Saudi Arabia also is concerned about threats from across its borders. Keenly alert to dissent in its Shia populated Eastern Province,¹⁰³ Saudi Arabia sent military assistance to Bahrain to support the Bahrain royal family's combating internal dissent. Saudi Arabia also has provided political and financial support

to Yemen to establish a stable government and diminish threats across the Saudi-Yemen border.¹⁰⁴ Also in Yemen, the Shia Houthi insurgency's proximity to Saudi Arabia could provide a channel for Iranian-inspired covert operations there. In late 2012, in response to an ambush that occurred near the Yemen-Saudi border, Yemeni Major-General Ali al-Ahmadi, president of Yemen's National Security Board, told Iran to stop training and funding the Shia insurgency.¹⁰⁵ Shortly afterward, the Yemen security chief was quoted in a Yemen Saba state news agency report that Yemen arrested members of an IRGC-led spy ring, and that Yemeni Houthis had traveled to Qom in Iran for indoctrination.¹⁰⁶ In March 2013, *Al Jazeera* reported that Saudi Arabia "arrested 18 suspects, including 16 Saudis, an Iranian and a Lebanese on suspicion of spying" who had "direct links to the intelligence services of Iran."¹⁰⁷ Lastly, "an airstrike, believed to be a U.S. drone attack, killed six suspected al Qaeda militants in [Yemen's] eastern province of Jawf, bordering Saudi Arabia."¹⁰⁸

Multiple Challenges in Yemen

Various Yemeni factions are making a courageous attempt to resolve their differences via a National Dialogue Conference. The Yemeni government's efforts to resolve internal differences resulted in an agreement with southern separatists to a form of federalism, according to press reports in late December 2013.¹⁰⁹ In the north, violence increased during late 2013 as Houthi rebels fighting ultraconservative Salafis had become fiercer and spread from Saada, one of the governorates of Yemen, to Hajjah Province.¹¹⁰ Again, reflecting the Yemeni government's efforts, there was a truce signed between the warring factions in mid-January 2014.¹¹¹

But Yemen is a hydra-headed battleground and violent protests and serious terrorist plots continue in Sana'a, Yemen's capital.¹¹² In early December 2013, jihadists conducted a multistage attack on Yemen's ministry of defense that resulted in 52 dead and more than 160 injured, according to Yemen's Supreme Security Committee. The December attack occurred amid a stalled National Dialogue Conference and heightened political tensions and a deteriorating security situation in Yemen, according to press reporting.¹¹³ During late 2013, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) attacked Yemeni army outposts in Shabwa and Hadramout provinces in a similar manner to the December defense ministry attack. Yemen's ungoverned

territory remains an area from which terrorist organizations, such as AQAP, have launched terrorist attacks targeting the United States.

According to think-tank assessments and media reporting, in addition to Yemen's unstable political situation, a resource-poor economy, and severe water shortage, the country is embattled by jihadists, a southern separatist movement, and a Shia Houthi insurgency in the north that is generally believed to be backed by Iran.¹¹⁴

Part II: South Asia

South Asia has its own current challenges and crises in waiting, including historic enmities, religious and ethnic tensions, failed economies, poor governance, corruption, insurgencies, ungoverned territories, and local and global jihadists.

Gathering Dangers in Afghanistan, Potential Consequences for Pakistan

The Afghan Taliban's return to power and/or Afghanistan's fragmentation are looming dangers. According to a late December press article, a new U.S. intelligence community National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Afghanistan "predicts that the Taliban and other power brokers will become increasingly influential as the United States winds down its longest war in [its] history, according to officials who have read the classified report or received briefings on its conclusions."¹¹⁵ These concerns were underscored by the Taliban attack on La Taverna du Liban restaurant in Kabul in mid-January 2014, which killed 21 people including Afghan civilians and foreigners from several countries, among them senior UN and IMF officials.¹¹⁶ La Taverna was considered a "secure oasis in a harsh and unpredictable country . . . jokingly referred to as "Rick's Café of Kabul." The fear is that this attack may not be a horrible, isolated terrorist event, but rather one with greater long-term consequences.¹¹⁷

According to Afghanistan specialists and academics, think tanks, and media sources, Afghanistan has a long list of significant challenges—poor governance; an illiterate population; lack of institutions and essential services; systemic corruption; narcotics/drug production; ethnic tensions; and abject poverty.¹¹⁸ John Sopko, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, notes that the "narcotics trade is poisoning the Afghan financial sector and fueling a growing illicit economy. . . . This in turn is undermining the Afghan state's legitimacy by stoking corruption, nourishing criminal

networks and providing significant financial support to the Taliban and other insurgent groups.”¹¹⁹ At the same time, the Afghan Taliban could remain a major challenge with its safe haven and support structure in Pakistan.¹²⁰

These challenges are likely to be complicated further by the scheduled 2014 U.S./International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) departure and the likely warfighting, logistic, and infrastructure consequences for Afghan National Security Forces, the Taliban, and regional players alike.¹²¹ A prime example of this coming concern is the U.S./ISAF training of Afghan police strike forces—Provincial Response Companies—and select army battalions, including special forces for counterinsurgent operations. While U.S. military sources judge that the Afghans have functioned effectively in this capacity, there is worry among the commanders of these elite units regarding what will happen when U.S. close air support, medical services, and intelligence capability is reduced as U.S./ISAF forces depart Afghanistan during 2014.¹²² Think tanks, diplomats, and media sources have telegraphed that these challenges will occur as the scheduled Afghan national election takes place next year and may result in an untested leadership taking over at a time of increased threat.¹²³ These kinds of “post-U.S.” concerns may also be behind U.S.-Afghan tensions associated with several key unfinished infrastructure projects, including the building of an Afghan “Pentagon” and Afghan political and military leaders’ suspicions in blaming the United States for its being on hold.¹²⁴ Also, Western officials are increasingly concerned that the Afghan government will be unable to maintain the roads and highways constructed since 2001, and have little faith the government will be able to perform simple tasks, such as filling potholes and repaving roads.¹²⁵

President Hamid Karzai’s increasingly acrimonious relationship with the United States, including his unwillingness to sign the U.S.-Afghanistan Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA), is complicating all of Afghanistan’s already profound challenges, according to press reporting.¹²⁶ The Karzai government’s handling of the Afghan commission investigation into airstrikes on a remote village on January 15, 2014, may have been used as a way of justifying Karzai’s stalling on signing the BSA.¹²⁷ Specifically, according to the *New York Times*, the commission, appointed by Karzai and led by Abdul Satar Khawasi, an Afghan with well-known anti-U.S. sentiments, accused the United States of engaging in a cover-up and “demonized” the United

States by falsely representing at least some of the evidence of shattered houses and bloodied bodies and “distributed other material whose provenance, at best, could not be determined.” A *New York Times* investigation determined that “much of the same material was posted on a Taliban Web site.”

The BSA impasse “has not only raised concerns about the future of the Afghan security forces, but put an instant and alarming drag on the Afghan business climate, already suffering as Western forces have pulled out.”¹²⁸ More specifically, this lack of Karzai’s signature is directly responsible for rising food and fuel prices, a slowdown in bank lending, no further private investment, and severely diminished domestic travel. This situation is particularly acute due to Afghanistan’s almost total reliance on foreign aid that accounts for about 97 percent of its gross domestic product. Serving to underscore this concern, according to the media account on the NIE, the NIE predicts, “Afghanistan would likely descend into chaos quickly if Washington and Kabul don’t sign a security pact that would keep an international military contingent there beyond 2014.”

This overall troubling environment may have been partly behind U.S. Embassy Kabul denial of U.S. visas for Afghan interpreters.¹²⁹ According to U.S. media reporting, there is some concern among U.S. officials that these Afghan men and women are essential to any long-term U.S. presence. This press reporting indicates that in a similar situation in 2010, U.S. Ambassador Karl Eikenberry warned in a cable to then Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton that the visa program could “have a significant deleterious impact on the staffing and morale, as well as undermining our overall mission in Afghanistan. Local staffs are not easily replenished in a society at 28 percent literacy.”¹³⁰ In the run-up to the departure of U.S. combat forces in 2014, such an exodus of capable Afghans could be perceived as a vote of no confidence in a future Afghanistan.

Pakistan has its own significant challenges. In addition to the country’s long-standing political, economic, demographic, and environmental problems, there has been a sharp increase in sectarian killings that have increasingly targeted Pakistan’s Shia professional class.¹³¹ Events of increased concern to Pakistani leaders and observers include Sunni-Shia clashes in the garrison city of Rawalpindi and Pakistan “now seeing sectarian tensions triggered not only by terrorism incidents, but average

clashes within the sectarian communities.” According to Knox Thames, director of policy and research at the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, “There is growing concern that the Shiite minority is also starting to organize militant groups.” According to the same media account, Pakistani analysts and some Pakistani political leaders “are increasingly questioning whether Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif can keep order in the nuclear-armed country of 180 million people.” In Karachi, Pakistan’s largest city, bloodshed is worsening and there was a huge spike in terrorist attacks during 2013, leading the deputy director of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement to say, “Something must be done soon, if Pakistan is to be saved,” according to media reports.¹³² Moreover, numerous Pakistani political observers and businessmen judge that the Taliban is increasing its control of Karachi neighborhoods, “making the city more ungovernable.” Reflecting overall increased Pakistan government security concerns, in late February 2013 the Pakistani army was planning for a major military operation in North Waziristan.¹³³

But Afghanistan’s fragmentation or instability may exacerbate Pakistan’s own internal challenges. According to various Pakistan observers, Pakistan Taliban-inspired instability, along with Afghanistan serving as a Pakistan Taliban “mirror” safe-haven, may further test Pakistan’s ability to maintain stability.¹³⁴ In November 2013, Pakistani Shias and Sunnis fought in Rawalpindi during a demonstration marking the Shia holy month of Muharram—numerous people were killed or wounded, a Sunni mosque was torched, and the Pakistan army had to impose a 2-day curfew and cut off cell phone service in dozens of cities.¹³⁵ In *Pakistan, A Hard Country*, Anatol Lieven writes, “If the Army splintered in the midst of a radicalized, Islamic upheaval, the collapse of Pakistan would be likely,” but “would result in civil war, not a national revolution.”¹³⁶

Continuing Indo-Pak Tensions

While the DNI National Intelligence Council’s (NIC) *Global Trends 2030* assessment that “low growth, rising food prices, and energy shortages will pose stiff challenges to governance in Pakistan (and Afghanistan),”¹³⁷ the decades-long Indo-Pak feuding also shows little sign of abating. To be fair, moments of diplomacy invite fragile optimism and the Islamabad government understands its internal Pakistan

Taliban challenge. But it continues to assess India as its primary strategic threat. Fundamental India-Pakistan disagreements, particularly concerning Kashmir, remain unresolved.

Pakistan President Nawaz Sharif may be predisposed to establishing better relations with India. But, another Mumbai-like terrorist attack would complicate matters. As stated in the NIC's *Global Trends 2030*, "India worries about a second Mumbai-style terrorist attack from militants backed by Pakistan. A major incident with many casualties and Pakistan fingerprints would put a weakened Indian government under tremendous pressure to respond with force, with the attendant risk of nuclear confrontation."¹³⁸ The risk of nuclear confrontation is heightened due to Pakistan's "development of tactical nuclear weapons, which have become increasingly central to Pakistani nuclear thinking in the past three years . . . that raises the risk of nuclear war fighting and accidents in periods of crisis, without producing the military benefits that have been claimed," according to Shashank Joshi, a research fellow of the Royal United Services Institute in London.¹³⁹ It is important to recall that Chaudry Zulfikar, Pakistan's chief prosecutor of the seven Pakistan militants accused in the Mumbai siege, was assassinated in early May 2013. Indian and U.S. government authorities blamed the Mumbai attack on Lashkar-e-Taiba, a Pakistani group headed by Lahore religious scholar and cleric Hafiz Mohammad Saeed. Western media has reported that Saeed continues to preach and has the backing of the Pakistani government. To date, Pakistani courts have refused to accept Mumbai-related evidence from Indian authorities. In the event of another escalating crisis, it is useful to recall that an engaged America twice in the past two decades, 1990 and 1999, played a decisive role in lowering Indo-Pak tensions that could have led to nuclear escalation.

India

Reflecting India's rise as an economic power, its situation is more complicated. According to the NIC's *Global Trends 2030*, "India faces many challenges: large inequities between rural and urban sectors and within society, increasing constraints on resources such as food and water, and a need for greater investment in science and technology in order to move its economy up a notch."¹⁴⁰ At the same time, according to *Global Trends 2030*, "Intensifying competition between India and China could lead

to great-power conflict that would not be limited to the South Asian theatre, drawing in the U.S. and others.¹⁴¹

According to a recent press account, India's 2014 national elections bear watching due to recent years of low economic growth, rising prices, weak political leadership, and corruption allegations.¹⁴² India's Hindu nationalist opposition party, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), named Narendra Modi to head its campaign; the BJP made political gains in late 2013 state elections.¹⁴³ The United States refused to grant Modi a visa in 2005 due to his alleged complicity in reprisal religious riots in 2002. More than 1,000 people, mostly Muslims, died in the violence. Even some of Modi's BJP allies criticized him "for his refusal to apologize for the riots. He has denied any wrongdoing."¹⁴⁴ Whatever the case, it is another example of sectarian politics inserting itself among Greater Middle East tensions.

South Asian Storm Clouds

In Lieven's *Pakistan: A Hard Country*, he writes that environmental endangerment in Pakistan due to climate change, rapid population growth, population displacement, and urbanization places great pressure on water availability.¹⁴⁵ The 2010 floods inundated one-fifth of the country, affected 20 million people, and resulted in tens of billions of dollars in economic losses. Lieven believes, "The likelihood is that the country will hold together, and that if it eventually collapses, it will be not Islamist extremism but climate change—an especially grim threat in the whole of South Asia—that finishes it off."¹⁴⁶ According to a 2012 CSIS report, per capita water availability in South Asia has decreased by 70 percent since 1950, and that "Changing rainfall patterns and retreating glaciers are expected to exacerbate the situation in the years ahead"¹⁴⁷ Unfortunately, discussion of South Asia water issues is highly political, "driven more by national and local interests than shared regional concerns," according to the CSIS study. The merging of water scarcity, nationalism, and regional conflicts would fuel greater antagonism.

Part III: Mitigating the Nightmare Years

The 20th-century concept of a Superpower is no longer viable. Others have put forward an indispensable United States, which must remain engaged and achieve

the stature of a “Great Nation” built on domestic political, military, and economic strength in parallel with value-driven concepts of fairness, dignity, and justice. The danger of a distracted, weakened “American empire” disengaging from world affairs is explained with great clarity by Robert Kaplan, who warns, “Lessening our engagement with the world would have devastating consequences for humanity.”¹⁴⁸ Notwithstanding current U.S. domestic political dysfunction, war weariness, and deep financial debt, the United States has a running start if it mends its domestic problems. Often, even those who hate the United States do so only until a crisis occurs and they need American help.

In the 21st century, hard power and soft power are likely to carry similar weight. Just as important, assessing U.S. national security demands great rigor. In such an environment, a dysfunctional government will be more vulnerable to being manipulated by others—friends and foes, states and nonstates—having a more focused understanding of their objectives. A devastating future crisis may unite us at some point, but by then it may be too late.

For policymakers, strategists, and intelligence officials, there is no magic formula for better anticipating crises prompted by the Nightmare Years to Come. But a place to start may be to shine “a lantern on the stern.”

Beware of Fiction Masquerading as Wisdom

Decisionmakers, strategists, and intelligence officers are swayed by often biased, former officials’ memoirs that could be used as a credible basis for dangerous analogies. Some publications do offer keen insights and perspectives, and are tremendous sources for constructive uses of history. But memoirs can be self-serving “war stories” employed to advance parochial agendas and protect reputations—foundations for a preferred legacy. Too often, memories are selective. In his well-researched *A Peace to End All Peace*, historian David Fromkin writes, “Russian and French official accounts of what they were doing in the Middle East at the time were, not unnaturally, works of propaganda; British officials accounts—and even the later memoirs of the officials concerned—were untruthful too. British officials who played a major role in the making of these decisions provided a version of events that was, at best, edited and, at worst, fictitious.”¹⁴⁹ A century later, official accounts remain vulnerable

to such shortcomings. Former CIA Director and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates writes in his own 1996 memoir, *From the Shadows*, that the memoirs of key players “usually are written by people with records to defend, axes to grind, or, too often, scores to settle.”¹⁵⁰

Even in the midst of a crisis, it may be productive to pause a moment and drill down on analogies that seem to frame discussion and drive decisions. In *Thinking in Time*, the late presidential advisor/scholar Richard Neustadt and Pentagon historian Ernest May suggest simple questions: what’s Known, Unclear and Presumed; what are the Likenesses and Differences?¹⁵¹ Some decisionmakers and senior advisors may have little patience for such discussion in the midst of crisis, but they should be given the opportunity to reject taking a deep breath before acting (or not).

Historic Interplay of the Policy Wish and Intelligence Failures: Distortion, Distraction, and Disregard

There seems to be a cause and effect between intelligence failures and the policy community’s distortion, distraction, or disregard for intelligence. This situation arises due to a combination of policy preferences—the “policy wish,” and a loss of confidence in the Intelligence Community’s (IC) competence and the IC’s bureaucratic weakness in the wake of previous failure. This interplay has recurred on notable occasions during the past 50 years. Though this dynamic is understandable, it is also dangerous.

A notable Distortion episode occurred in 1963 in the aftermath of two significant intelligence failures: the Bay of Pigs and Soviet missiles in Cuba. Specifically, as presented in the CIA’s Center for the Study of Intelligence, *CIA and the Vietnam Policymakers*, the February 1963 draft of the IC’s National Intelligence Estimate, “Prospects for South Vietnam” (NIE 53-63) was disseminated to the United States Intelligence Board. The Intelligence Board, along with Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) John McCone, sharply criticized the pessimism of the Estimate draft, a pessimism that already had been diluted. As a result, DCI McCone remanded the draft and directed the authors to “seek out the views of senior policymakers.”¹⁵² This resulted in an April 1963 revised draft that was a “markedly more optimistic forecast of the effectiveness of U.S. and Vietnamese efforts.” McCone later told

President Kennedy that the revised NIE “indicated we could win.” Harold Ford writes, “The reworking of intelligence exacted a steep price. By so altering the tone of the NIE’s judgments and producing an authoritative but misleading Estimate, McCone’s Office of Estimates, supposedly above the fray of policy dispute, confirmed the expectations of progress that senior policymakers had long entertained but would soon have to abandon.”¹⁵³

The following excerpts from the draft and final versions of NIE 53-16 illustrate this Distortion. First, here is the February 1963 draft:

The struggle for South Vietnam at best will be protracted and costly [because] very great weaknesses remain and will be difficult to surmount. Among those are lack [sic] of aggressive and firm leadership at all levels of command, poor morale among the troops, lack of trust between the peasant and soldier, poor tactical use of available forces, a very inadequate intelligence system, and obvious Communist penetration of the South Vietnamese military organization.

Compare this with the excerpt from the April 1963 final version:

We believe that Communist progress has been blunted and that the situation is improving. . . . Improvements which have occurred during the past year now indicate that the Viet Cong can be contained militarily and that further progress can be made in expanding the area of government control and in creating greater security in the countryside.

Harold Ford ends this episode by writing, as the authors of *The Pentagon Papers* later concluded, “The intelligence and reporting problems during this period cannot be explained away. . . . In retrospect, [the Estimators] were not only wrong, but more importantly, they were influential.”¹⁵⁴

A Distraction illustration underscores that Policy and Intelligence successes and failures generally are not one or the other. Rather, there usually are policy and intelligence contributions to success and failure. Distraction in 1978 concerning events in

Iran is one of those joint efforts that resulted in a national security failure—the role of U.S. policy and intelligence in an escalating crisis that resulted in the toppling of the Shah of Iran.

In 1978, the Carter administration was deeply involved in other major foreign policy issues, such as final negotiations on Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty with Moscow and complex negotiations on normalizing relations with the People's Republic of China. Of perhaps greatest relevance to the escalating Iran crisis was that in the fall of 1978 all senior administration officials, including the President, were immersed in detailed discussions at Camp David with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. Then-National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote in his memoir, *Power and Principle*, "But it must be noted here that until the crisis became very grave, the attention of top decision makers, myself included, was riveted on other issues, all extraordinarily time-consuming, personally absorbing, and physically demanding."¹⁵⁵ Brzezinski also adds that the crisis in Nicaragua was "beginning to preoccupy and absorb us." Day-to-day monitoring on the worsening situation in Iran was left to an extremely capable, though mid-level, National Security Council staff officer: Gary Sick.

At the same time, CIA was seriously weakened as a result of congressional investigations during the mid-1970s on CIA excesses. Politically and bureaucratically reeling, CIA cut a significant number of Clandestine Service officers. CIA was further constrained on Iran. In Gary Sick's *All Fall Down*, he writes, "To operate effectively it needed the cooperation of the shah and his government. Moreover, it had been many years since the CIA had had the kind of contacts within the opposition that would have permitted it to influence the course of events."¹⁵⁶ These restraints also applied to the Department of State. Moreover, Kissinger let it be known he had great respect for the Shah and his understanding of political realities.¹⁵⁷ The Shah, in effect, would be Kissinger's senior analyst on Iran.

This deference to the Shah's political acumen was part of a much larger U.S. reliance arranged by President Nixon and National Security Advisor Kissinger during May 1972 meetings with the Shah in Tehran. This reliance included a U.S. guarantee that the Shah could access some of the most sophisticated nonnuclear technology in the U.S. military arsenal. Gary Sick writes, "With the U.S. bogged

down in Vietnam, with U.S. domestic opinion firmly opposed to any new military ventures abroad, with the withdrawal of the British from their strategic role east of Suez, and with the oil of the Persian Gulf beginning to be recognized as a key factor in Western security, there was an inescapable logic in asking a strong regional power to accept a security role that the U.S. was simply incapable of undertaking at the time.”¹⁵⁸ President Nixon looked across the table to the Shah and said simply “Protect me,” according to Sick’s account sourced to a senior Nixon administration official familiar with the Tehran visit.

Nonetheless, there was an intelligence failure and, according to Sick, this was most notably captured in “a 23-page study entitled ‘Iran after the Shah,’ published in August 1978.” Sick further writes, “The study was prefaced with the judgment, just one month before the Jaleh square incident, that Iran is not in a revolutionary or even a ‘pre-revolutionary’ situation.” Also, President Carter, in his memoir *Keeping Faith* writes, “According to a CIA assessment, issued in August, ‘Iran is not in a revolutionary or even a prerevolutionary situation.’”¹⁵⁹ Carter writes that the report went on to say that the military was loyal to the monarchy and that those who were in opposition, both the violent and nonviolent, did not have the capacity to be more than troublesome in any transition to a new regime.¹⁶⁰ As the crisis became more severe, President Carter and Brzezinski believed there was significant weakness in political intelligence, and the President advised CIA Director Stansfield Turner of his concerns in writing, according to Brzezinski. Brzezinski writes that in September 1978, “I should add that, at this stage, neither I nor anyone else in Washington, to *my knowledge* (emphasis mine), was aware of the Shah’s illness. . . . It would have made some difference in the kinds of assessments and policy options we formulated.”¹⁶¹ Concurrent with the Camp David discussions and thereafter, it was increasingly evident that the Shah’s ability to remain in power was significantly diminished: anti-Shah demonstrations occurred throughout the country; general strikes, including in the oil industry, took place; and significant elements of the Iranian military, particularly the Shah’s personal security force, “The Immortals,” withdrew their support for the Shah. Clandestine sources were not needed to observe the Shah’s desperate position. More generally, the Shah’s megalomania was observable and became greatly exaggerated during the 1970s and included the

over-the-top celebration of the Pahlavi dynasty at Persepolis that served to ignite anti-Shah sentiments.

The policy distractions and intelligence failings contributed to disagreements and confusion among senior administration officials, as articulated in General Robert E. Huyser's *Mission to Tebran*. As President Carter's personal emissary to Tehran in November 1978, Huyser had to contend with senior administration policy disagreements and differing interpretations of his mission—for example, did the President's "draft" mission statement for Huyser communicate the need for the Iranian military to support a civilian government, that no Iranian military leaders should depart Iran, and/or was it a statement that endorsed U.S. support for a military coup? According to Huyser, Brzezinski believed the message gave the Iranian military a green light to stage a military coup, but that President Carter intended it to convey such a meaning only as a last resort.¹⁶² But the Department of State, Brzezinski, and the President seem to have had different understandings of when the "last resort" was present. According to President Carter's *Keeping Faith*, the President lost faith in U.S. Ambassador William Sullivan, was irritated with bureaucratic battles via media leaks, and believed Brzezinski's and Secretary of State Vance's opposing views were undermining implementation of his directives.¹⁶³

A third episode of the interplay of policy preferences and intelligence failures, Disregard, occurred in the aftermath of the 9/11 intelligence failure and the judgment of key Bush administration policymakers that CIA failed to piece together Iraq's links with al Qaeda. According to Michael Gordon and General (Ret.) Bernard Trainor in *Cobra II*, Appendix, "Principal Challenges in Post-Saddam Iraq,"¹⁶⁴ the Director of National Intelligence's NIC made the following judgments in January 2003 prior to Operation *Iraqi Freedom*:

◆ "Iraq would be unlikely to split apart, but a post-Saddam authority would face a deeply divided society with a significant chance that domestic groups would engage in violent conflict with each other unless an occupying force prevented them from doing so."

◆ "Score settling would occur throughout Iraq between those associated with Saddam's regime and those who had suffered under it."

◆ “If Baghdad were unable to exert control over the Iraqi countryside Al Qa’ida or other extremist terrorist groups could operate from remote areas.”

◆ “Attitudes toward a foreign force would depend largely on the progress made in transferring power as well as on the degree to which that force were perceived as providing necessary security and fostering reconstruction and a return to prosperity.”

U.S. war strategy, force structure, and lack of post-Saddam governance planning showed a high disregard for these intelligence judgments. This Disregard turned on its head *The Pentagon Papers* conclusion mentioned above: the 2003 Estimators were right, but not influential, an apparent victim of a loss of policymaker confidence and weakened bureaucratic position.

Inattention to Unintended Consequences

Negative consequences to U.S. national security may have been an unintended byproduct of U.S. decisionmaking in the Middle East for decades. There is little a policymaker can do if consequences are unforeseeable. But often that is not the case. Unintended is not necessarily unexpected, nor a total surprise. To be sure, usually during a period of severe crisis, policymakers are confronted with options that are either bad or worse—no matter the decision, the option chosen will be a bad one and will have unwelcome consequences. Welcome to Washington. The best a policymaker can do is to make the least bad choice and mitigate the impact of likely negative consequences.

Israel’s June 1982 invasion of Lebanon is one of the landmark events of the past 30 years. Then-Secretary of State Alexander Haig writes in his memoir, “Despite the strongest possible warnings by the United States, Israel launched her offensive at last.”¹⁶⁵ Haig states that the United States was very much aware of Israel’s intention to invade Lebanon, though the United States did not know the exact timing or the nature of the precipitating event that would cause Israel to invade.¹⁶⁶ Notwithstanding Israel’s decision to invade, Haig judged that “dangerous and tragic though this turn of events was, it provided a historic opportunity to deal with the problems of Lebanon” by removing the causes of Lebanon’s national crisis—that is, the presence of two foreign armies—the Syrian “peacekeeping” force and the military arm of the

Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).¹⁶⁷ At the same time, Haig also understood that Israel's "de facto occupation" stripped Lebanon's government of its authority and exacerbated the "conditions for strife among the religious and ethnic communities in Lebanon."¹⁶⁸

In the year prior to Israel's invasion of Lebanon, the United States supported Israel's policy objective of ridding Lebanon of its Palestinian guerrilla presence, though senior U.S. administration officials, particularly Secretary Haig, strongly and repeatedly cautioned Israeli leaders, mostly Prime Minister Begin and Minister of Defense Ariel Sharon, against Israeli overreaction to events. Extremely harsh language between U.S. and Israeli officials occurred prior to and during Israel's invasion. Senior administration officials were frustrated by "the worst case of bad faith on the part of Israel that the U.S. administration had ever experienced," according to Deputy National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane in his personal memoir *Special Trust*, and "the Israeli government repeatedly lied to Washington about its intentions," including Sharon's disregard for U.S. negotiated cease-fires.¹⁶⁹ (In the midst of the Lebanon crisis, Secretary Haig was forced to resign because of his disagreements with President Reagan and related bickering among senior administration officials.)

Though 15,000 Palestinian fighters and its PLO leadership were evacuated to Tunisia on U.S. warships, there soon occurred unintended consequences, including massacres of over 850 Palestinian women and children at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps by a pro-Israel Lebanese militia; the assassination of the pro-U.S./Israel Lebanese president-elect, Bashir Jumayyil; the suicide truck bomb attack that targeted the U.S. Embassy in Beirut in April 1983 that killed 63, including 17 U.S. diplomats, CIA staff, and military personnel; the October 1983 truck bomb explosions at the U.S. Marine Barracks and French military headquarters with the loss of 241 U.S. Marines and 58 French paratroopers, respectively; the taking of Western hostages; and of possibly the greatest long-term impact, an increased Iranian presence in Lebanon that led to the establishment of Lebanese Hizballah. The latter occurred due to the arrival of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and its ability to exploit an exacerbated political-security vacuum resulting from the Israeli invasion during Lebanon's civil war. The early godfather of Hizballah was Iran's ambassador to Syria, Ali Akbar Mohtashemi-Pur.

As Haig's memoir indicates, the United States ultimately acquiesced to Israeli decisionmaking.¹⁷⁰ But the extent of the invasion was motivated largely by Israeli personal and political ambitions.¹⁷¹ According to Amos Perlmutter, author and editor of numerous Middle East publications, the Lebanon war was intended to douse any vestiges of Palestinian nationalism and was "the logical outcome of his [Begin's] dream of Eretz Yisrael [Complete Israel]."¹⁷² While Begin viewed Defense Minister Sharon as his "sword and man of action," Sharon took "Begin's rhetoric, his aspirations and his dreams for his own. . . . Sharon managed to hold Begin captive to his own showy rhetoric, and in that sense, has managed to manipulate Begin."¹⁷³

As it turned out, the 1982 Kahan Commission of Inquiry determined Israel's leadership had acted in a manner that undermined Israel's strategic interests and that the country bore indirect responsibility because the areas where the Palestinian civilian massacres occurred were controlled by Israeli forces. The commission's findings resulted in Sharon's firing. As for Begin, his premiership ended with his "well-known psychological tailspin of depression and withdrawal" because of his genuine distress in reaction to mounting Israeli casualties; his wife's death and death of longtime colleague Simcha Erlich; diminished Israeli domestic and international prestige;¹⁷⁴ and the establishment of a stronger, Iranian-supported, radical Islamist presence in Lebanon—a presence that has left Hizballah with a significant political and military force in Lebanon today.¹⁷⁵ There was no Israeli victory and certainly no benefit to U.S. national security.

For the United States, in addition to the destruction and loss of U.S. lives at the U.S. Embassy and Marine Barracks and the U.S./Western hostage crisis in Iran, there were Hizballah-sponsored airline hijackings and the discouraging criminal behavior associated with the Iran-Contra affair that came perilously close to ending the Reagan Presidency. The larger national security failure, however, was expanded Iranian influence, an unintended consequence that Israel, the United States, and its Middle East allies continue to deal with to this day.

Finally, unwanted and unintended consequences do not arise only from failure, but also from success. U.S. support for the Afghan mujahideen was decisive in forcing the Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan, further weakening an already teetering Soviet Union. But there was minimal focus on the unintended consequences of

U.S. lack of interest for the post-Soviet Afghan period, the ultimate collapse of the remaining pro-Soviet government, civil war among the various mujahideen militias, and the Taliban takeover. Just as important, the unintended consequence of the Afghan mujahideen victory was the export of fellow mujahideen—“Arab Afghans”—returning to their home countries.

Such an unintended consequence was the increased extremist threat to Egypt, specifically the Islamic Grouping (Gamaat Islamiyya) and Egyptian Islamic Jihad. Egypt, with U.S. support, succeeded in defeating this internal Islamist threat during the early 1990s, but it also resulted in senior Egyptian radicals—for example, future Osama bin Laden deputy Ayman Zawahiri, Abu Hafs al-Masri, and Abu Ubaydah al-Banshiri—ultimately joining al Qaeda. The aggregate of Taliban Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden/Ayman Zawahiri-led al Qaeda, and Egyptian operational command—including lead hijacker Muhammad Atta—set the stage for the attacks on September 11, 2001.

Beyond Cautionary Tales: Prescriptions for the Policy High Table and Bureaucratic Trench

Nightmares call for preemption or mitigation. A few modest remedies are proposed below, though other more important remedies are likely out there. But here is a place to start.

Answer the Right Questions. What’s the policy? Although a straightforward question, it is not easily answered or communicated; for example, concerning Syria’s war, is the policy about Syria or is it more about Iran? Or Israel? Or Russia? Or regional sectarian war? Is there a U.S. policy for the Greater Middle East or are there policy stovepipes for Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, among others, for proliferation, terrorism, cyber war, and ecological endangerment? Whatever the case, a political strategy needs to define a sustainable political outcome.

What is the nature of the situation? Define and assess the problem. Getting it right is fundamental. Spend a lot of time answering this question. Get it wrong and most everything goes south. Be sensitive to pressures associated with a “policy wish.” And watch out for those dangerous analogues. Often, uninformed and/or ideologically motivated officials misuse analogies as a convenient and

self-serving way of turning the conversation to what they think they know—and their desired outcome.

What is the mission? Are the mission's objectives "aspirational" or receptive to strategy formulation and operational execution? Is the mission statement coherent with the policy and the nature of the situation? If not, is there an effort to mitigate the differences? The policymakers, strategists, and intelligence officers need to work seamlessly on this issue.

Implementation. In the policy, military, and intelligence world, the seeds of a strategy's greatest weakness exist—though often hidden—at the very beginning. Policy decisions and operations invested in that strategy are increasingly difficult to question or reset as time passes—change is too hard. Key players need to be empowered to ask the question: What would change your mind about the viability of a particular policy, strategy, and/or operation? In answering the question, do not be afraid to zero-base your thinking.

Everyone needs to know the probable consequences of going forward with or without change. A highly respected, empowered "red team" needs to be established early on and be a coequal member of any decisionmaking circle—the red team needs a senior-conferred "hunting license" to ask all the hard, uncomfortable questions. Also, the red team may be responsible for raising the second- and third-order effects of decisionmaking.

Who is in charge? Is there a "go to" person? Is that person approachable? Would someone else be in charge if they were not otherwise distracted? What happens when that person is no longer distracted? Mixed messaging will compromise operations and diminish international support. It is essential to deal directly with or mitigate U.S. Government conflicting internal rivalries, petty personal ambitions, and bureaucratic priorities. We know all too well that U.S. Government officials have a long history of doing battle via media leaks.

For the policymaker, strategist, and intelligence official, understanding coalition politics is essential. States, nonstates, and individuals have conflicting overt and covert agendas that, when present, will undermine presumed agreements. More often than we like to admit, working with friends can be more difficult than working against enemies.

Part IV: In the Trenches

Competence matters. Acquiring subject matter expertise and having the capacity for cognitive agility have to exist prior to the crisis. At crucial moments, competence may be the ability to ask the right question(s). For participants in the decisionmaking process, the regrettable “holding back” when you have a useful contribution is a common experience. But “holding back” is different from “holding steady”—that is, timing your contribution to its greatest effect. Personal and institutional gravitas are imperative to enable appropriate “push back” in the event of pressures associated with a “policy wish.”

Once a crisis starts, an information explosion, much of which is “noise” or disinformation, overwhelms everyone. A surge of personnel may provide some value-added, but may dilute existing competence. The crisis manager needs to know the difference and balance the tradeoffs.

The crisis manager needs to be alert to change in the “strategic and operational environment.” How will such change impact policy, diplomacy, military, and intelligence decisions and operations? In the intelligence world, strategic or operational change may impact intelligence assets’ continued access, motivation, security posture, and/or reliability. There may be a tendency to default to the comfort zone of the status quo. Failure to address change would be, at best, lazy and, at worst, dangerous.

For a long-term crisis, great importance needs to be attached to being physically and emotionally fit. Sustained stress will denigrate performance. Some denigration will almost always be impossible to eliminate, but the crisis manager needs to strategize against significant degradation.

Crisis management is a team sport—it is not all about you. As the crisis unfolds and/or continues, tasking, coordination, cooperation, and follow-up will be a great challenge. A genuine crisis creates a new world. Not everyone is comfortable with that reality.

When mistakes are made—and they will happen—take a deep breath and move on. A senior manager would do well to temper any anger and avoid extremely hard elbows when mistakes occur. It is unlikely that major success can occur without risk-taking. Effective crisis management is damaged when personnel are inhibited and doing nothing becomes the default safe strategy.

When briefing or being briefed, be aware of “Activity” versus “Accomplishment”—for example, training may occur, but does training translate into operational utilization? Police training in the use of a Glock or long gun is merely “Activity” if the trainee has no weapon or ammunition after being trained.

When dealing with the interagency or coalition challenges, be prescriptive as appropriate. Being the bad news messenger goes only so far. Senior policy and intelligence officials need to place a “Thou shalt not whine” sign at their office entrance.

Part V: A Final Comment

Finally, in anticipation of this increasingly dangerous world, there is an urgent need for a rigorous and informed public discussion on the current and future role of intelligence, including the recent surveillance-related disclosures; increasingly sophisticated drone technology; and cyber war tools. These new technologies currently exist without a public discussion that could lead to a recognized framework for legitimate use. Interestingly, opponents and supporters of U.S. drone policy agree on the need for clearer rules and a publicly explained legal and moral framework. For now, it is a free-for-all limited only by capability and imagination. These discussions need to occur now—not in the aftermath of the next 9/11-type attack. To wait for the aftermath of a coming nightmare would almost certainly create an atmosphere for granting license for severe draconian measures and greater loss of privacy and personal liberties. The discussion should take place in a more dispassionate moment. The foundation of the national security system is built on a trust that everyone is focused on furthering U.S. national security interests—not for any particular ideology, partisan, or personal gain. In a democratic society, this trust must extend to the general public.

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